

Decision Memo
SURFACE EXPLORATION AND SURFACE DRILLING
2021-2022 Plan of Operations Zarembo Minerals Company, LLC
USDA Forest Service
Tongass National Forest
Wrangell Ranger District
Wrangell, Alaska

BACKGROUND

The USDA Forest Service, Wrangell Ranger District, received a multi-year Plan of Operations (POO) from Zarembo Minerals Company LLC. This Decision Memo addresses one year of that POO from August 2021 through July 2022. Plans of Operations for Zarembo Minerals have been approved annually since 2006. Approved activities included surface exploration, surface drilling (see Figure 1), uses of a closed spur road, and the onsite storage of drilling equipment. In 2006 through 2008 Zarembo Minerals have drilled 10 holes (2-inch diameter) to obtain rock core samples. No holes have been drilled since 2008.



Figure 1: Zarembo Minerals Surface Drilling Frenchie Claims Zarembo Island

DECISION

I have decided to continue to authorize Zarembo Minerals' surface exploration activities in the claim blocks identified in the Plan of Operations (see Map 1) from August 2021 through July 2022, and onsite storage of drilling equipment during the 2021-2022 winter season as previously approved. Zarembo Minerals is also approved for motorized use of a closed spur road in the former Frenchie Timber Sale Unit 3 as partial access to their mining claims for exploration activities from August 2021 through July 2022. No cross-country travel by vehicles and/or equipment is approved.

Zarembo Minerals has been approved to conduct exploration work on their mineral claims since 2006. Due to the economic recession and other factors they have not yet accomplished all the work and are planning to continue during 2021 and 2022. These activities are as described in the Zarembo Minerals POO, Phases 1, 2 and 3, received January 13, 2017. All requirements and mitigation measures approved in the past remain in effect. A Reclamation Performance Bond will continue to be held by the Forest Service while Zarembo Minerals' equipment and supplies are on National Forest System lands. All lands approved for surface drilling are on National Forest System lands within the mining claims held by Zarembo Minerals Company LLC.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as the short-term (1 year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than one mile of low standard road (Service Level D, FSH 7709.56), or use and minor repair of existing roads. (36 CFR 220.6 Section (e) (8))

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I considered resource conditions identified in agency procedures in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species. Biological Evaluations completed in 2012 and 2016 for sensitive plants remain valid. No sensitive plants will experience impacts that would cause or contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species. A Biological Evaluation for wildlife was completed in 2015. There are no threatened or endangered wildlife species affected by this project. All project activities will be consistent with the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (5/2007), and the requirements for Bald Eagles in 50 CFR 22.26 (11/2009).
- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – There are no municipal watersheds present in the project area. The degree of effect on flood plains and wetlands in the project area will not change with continuing the exploration activities.

- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – There are no congressionally designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas present in the project area.
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – There are no inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas in the project area.
- Research natural areas – There are no research natural areas present in the project area.
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – There are no American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites in the project area. The Wrangell District Ranger consulted with the Wrangell tribal government for continuation of the plan of operations.
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – In 2006 Forest Service archaeologists surveyed the project area and found no historic properties that will be affected by project activities. Current activities continue to have no potential to affect historic properties.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was listed as a proposal on the Tongass National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA), and an electronic mailing of the proposal was sent to a mailing list including people who have subscribed to be informed about this type of project. The Wrangell District Ranger consulted with the Wrangell tribal government for continuation of the occupancy and use. No written or electronic comments/correspondence have been received.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the 2016 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The surface exploration portions of the project are located within an area identified in the Forest Plan as having a Land Use Designation of Timber Production, Modified Landscape, and Scenic Viewshed. The surface drilling portions of the project are located within an area identified in the Forest Plan as having a Land Use Designation of Timber Production. Timber Production, Modified Landscape and Scenic Viewshed lands are open to mineral entry. Direction for management of these areas includes assuring rights granted under the General Mining Law of 1872, and National Forest Mining Regulations 36 CFR 228. Claim holders are to be permitted reasonable access to mining claims, leases, and material sites and authorized the orderly mineral resource development with the provisions of an approved Plan of Operations in accordance with National Forest Mining Regulations 36 CFR 228 and FSM 2800.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OPPORTUNITIES

This decision falls within a category of actions which are not subject to administrative review opportunities.



IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented immediately.

CONTACT

For additional information contact:

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CLINT R. KOLARICH

District Ranger

Date

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Map 1 – Zaremba Minerals' Claim Blocks and Proposed Drill Sites

